What's New from the American Community Survey?

Income data is now available for more Utah counties than ever before

It's almost more than a data geek can bear! I've got to write this article about the new income data available from the American Community Survey. Okay, writing about data—that is not a problem for me. The real problem? So much data, so little room to write.

However, perhaps the most important information I can relay to you here is this: income data from the American Community Survey (ACS) is now available for more Utah counties than ever before. In the past, ACS only provided estimates for Utah's largest counties—Salt Lake, Weber, Utah, Davis, Washington, and Cache.

However, economic, social, income, and housing data are now available for what the Census Bureau considers "mid-sized" counties, cities, and towns—those with populations of 20,000 or more. In Utah, that means ACS data is now available for Box Elder, Iron, Sanpete, Summit, Tooele, Uintah and Wasatch counties plus more than 30 cities and towns.

On Average. . .

Of course, there is one small catch. Due to small sample sizes, data for the midsize areas is averaged for three years. For example, instead of getting a median household income figure for 2007, you get a figure that's averaged for 2005 through 2007. Despite this fact, averaged data presents a far better alternative to having to wait until at least 2011 to get demographic data for your local area. Even data users in larger areas can benefit from using the averaged data. Survey sample sizes for the three-year averages are much larger and therefore provide more accurate estimates.

So Much Data, So Little Space

As previously mentioned, there's a lot of ACS income data to write about. Median household, median family, number of families/households by income level, income by age, income by gender, earnings by occupation, type of income, poverty, etc.—and I have even less space left.

Gini in a Bottle

So, I'm going to very briefly explore just one little gem of income information I recently discovered nestled in the cornucopia of ACS data—the Gini coefficient. In the briefest possible terms, the Gini coefficient is a ratio used to measure income inequality. Gini coefficients range between "0" (everyone has the exact same income) and "1" (one person has all the income). A lower Gini coefficient indicates a more equal income distribution, while a higher Gini coefficient signifies a more unequal distribution.

Some Counties are More Equal than Others!

Check out the chart that accompanies this article. The first thing you'll notice is that the state and all the counties listed display lower Gini coefficients than the United States. Interestingly, Uintah County has the highest Gini coefficient among reported counties. Could this be because of the difference in high-paying oil-gas industries and everyone else? Summit and Salt Lake counties also show higher-than-Utah-average income inequality. Counties with the most equal income distribution (Tooele, Box Elder and Sanpete) tend to be less populated and less urbanized.

To delve into recently released American Community Survey data, go to:

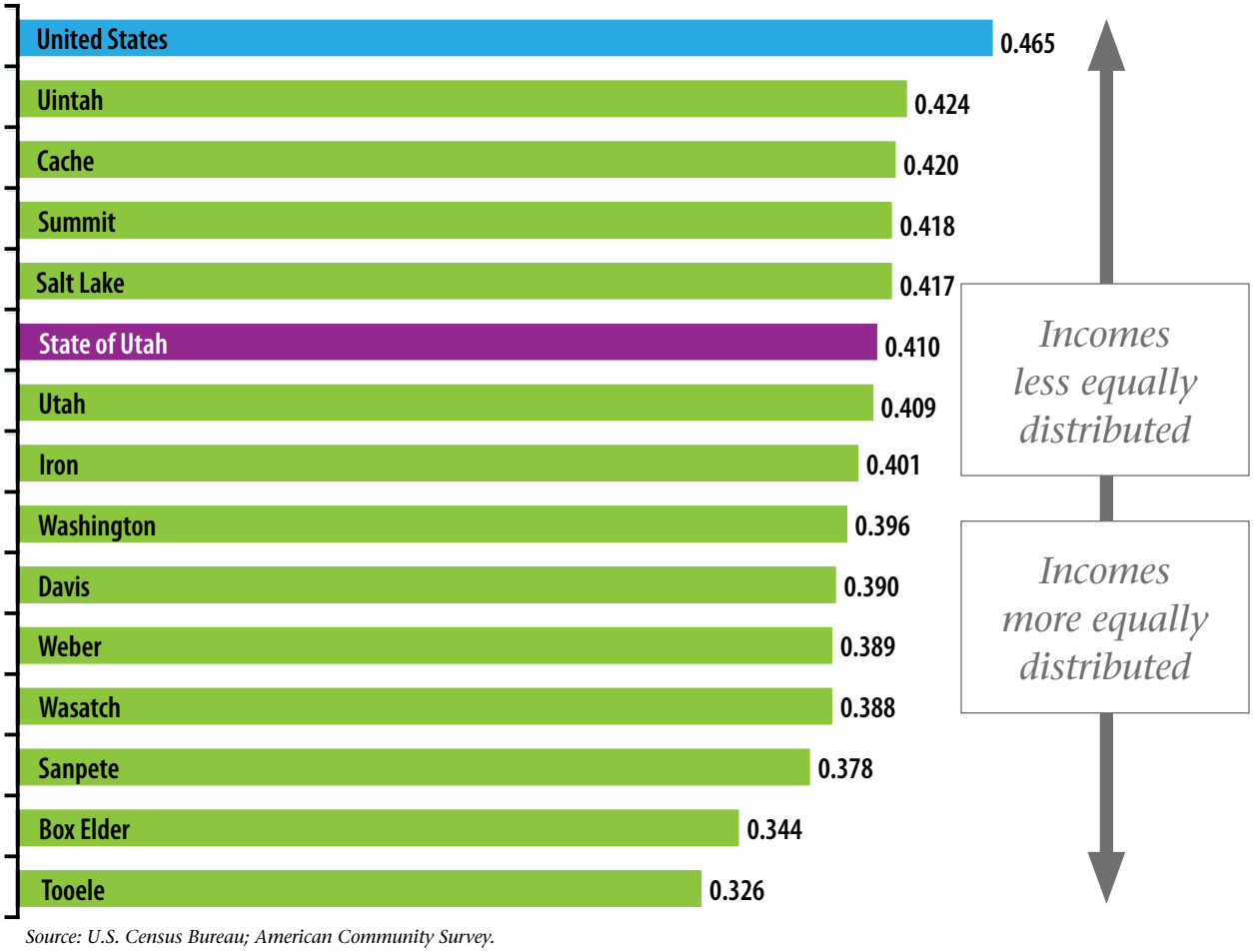
•http://factfinder.census.gov

Gini Indices of Income Equality

from the

American Community Survey

2005-2007



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey.